

A Mengele survivor speaks out

Subjected to the Nazi doctor's experiments, she's still searching for answers on what was done to her

By MICHAEL MILLER

of the Journal Star

Eva Mozes Kor doesn't want pity. She wants respect.

"The message is not of 'poor me,' " the Jewish woman said.

"I hate pity. Actually, I demand respect. I don't even like the word 'tolerance.' The ideal should be mutual respect, because you're going to find out that every human being wants to be respected for who they are and what they do, and if that respect is not given, people are going to want to try to get it in some other way."



Eva Mozes Kor

Who she is: Eva Mozes Kor is a survivor of Auschwitz. She and her twin sister, Miriam, were part of the experiments on twins carried out in 1944-45 by Dr. Josef Mengele. They originally were from Hungary. Miriam died in 1993. Eva lives in Terre Haute, Ind., with her husband, Michael, where she is a real estate agent. Her son, Alex, is a Galesburg doctor, and her daughter, Rina, is an accountant in Michigan.

When: Kor will be in Peoria on April 12 to speak at the Jewish community's Day of Remembrance service. She will be on national television on April 13 to talk about her lawsuit against Bayer Corp.

Book: Kor has written "Echoes From Auschwitz."

Web site: Her organization, Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Laboratory Experiment Survivors, has a World Wide Web site at www.candles-museum.com.

Ways like bombs, or bullets, she said. Or genocide.

Kor has gotten respect by

surviving and telling her story — the story of a "Mengele twin" who survived Auschwitz.

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■ Eva Mozes Kor tells how she and her twin sister became subjects of experiments at the Auschwitz death camp.

■ Kor sues Bayer, claiming the pharmaceutical company was involved in Mengele's research.

The 65-year-old Terre Haute, Ind., resident and her now-deceased twin sister, Miriam, were 10-year-old Hungarian Jews forced into the notorious experiments on twins conducted by Dr. Josef Mengele, also known as "the angel of death," during World War II. Of the 1,500 twins experimented on, approximately 250 are alive today.

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“These experiments were not dangerous in my opinion, but they were unbelievably demeaning and they made me feel that I was no more than a piece of meat. The only way I could cope was to blank it out of my mind.”

Eva Mozes Kor

SURVIVOR Twins were favored targets of experimenters

Kor will tell her story in Peoria on April 12, the eve of Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Jewish Federation of Peoria, which is sponsoring her appearance at the Jewish Community Observance of Yom Hashoah, has asked that the time and place of Kor's speech not be published "because of space and security concerns."

Kor is the wife of another survivor and the mother of two grown children, one of whom, Alex, is a doctor in Galesburg. She said she didn't talk about her experiences publicly until the late 1960s. It was then that she realized prejudice was alive and well and needed to be addressed.

"There are some very important lessons that I have learned by surviving Auschwitz and by coping with the memories, and I cannot pretend that I did not survive it," Kor said in her thick accent. "I honestly wish none of it ever happened and I would not have to talk about it. But since it did, then it must have a purpose."

It took a while for her to think about it that way, though.

After the war, Eva Mozes lived in communist Romania with an aunt, and she immigrated to Israel in 1950. There, she served in the military for eight years and taught drafting. She met Michael Kor, a survivor of the Buchenwald subcamps who had moved to Terre Haute and was visiting Israel. They wed in 1960, and she began living in Terre Haute.

For several years, Eva Kor endured taunts and harassment from the town's children and bigots. Halloween, with its "tricks," was especially difficult for her, but her family also had to put up with cross burnings and swastikas.

"I was terrorized for 11 years," she said. "During that time, all I really wanted was to

Test subjects were often injected with drugs and disease toxins, Kor says

By MICHAEL MILLER

of the Journal Star

Eva and Miriam Mozes were 10 when their family was taken from their home in the Transylvania region of Hungary and sent to Auschwitz in 1944.

They last saw their mother on the train platform at the camp in Poland. They were allowed to live, but their survival had a horrible price: Twins at the camp were designated for medical experiments supervised by Dr. Josef Mengele, Auschwitz's infamous "angel of death."

"We no longer had a family," said Eva Mozes, now Eva Kor. She and Miriam never saw their parents or two older sisters again.

Eva and Miriam were processed, stripped naked, tattooed and marched to a barracks at Auschwitz II (Birkenau) filled with other twin girls. Nazi experimenters prized the genetically similar twins, Kor said, because one could be given diseases or drugs and the bodily reactions could be compared to the other, who was the "control" of the experiment.

About 1,500 sets of twins were used in experiments at Auschwitz/Birkenau, Kor said. Most of them died, but many are still alive.

tell my story. I knew that if I could somehow tell my story, people would leave me alone."

She finally did tell her story when the local NBC affiliate asked her, as president of the local Jewish Federation chapter, to comment on the mini-series "Holocaust" when it aired in 1977. Students in the Terre Haute area were fascinated by her story, and she was asked to lecture, she said.

Since then, she has given between 500 and 800 lectures and written two books.

The first night in camp, Kor said, the other girls "tried to tell us about the camps, the gas chambers, the flames leaping out of the chimney."

"It was really difficult for any human being to really comprehend what it was going on," Kor said. But, she added, "the smell was there." It was the odor of cremated humans.

Three times a week, Kor said, they were taken to Auschwitz I, the main camp, to be physically "inspected" for six to eight hours at a time, all the while naked.

"On occasion they would paint our bodies with some dark liquid that was suffocating the skin," she said.

"These experiments were not dangerous in my opinion, but they were unbelievably demeaning and they made me feel that I was no more than a piece of meat."

"The only way I could cope was to blank it out of my mind."

Experiments done on other days would involve being taken to a laboratory in Birkenau, Kor said. Blood would be taken from the left arm while "always a minimum of five injections were injected into my right arm, and that was a lot more painful."

"I would turn my head away and I would count the needle penetrations," she said. "On occasion, I glimpsed huge vials. I have no idea what was in them."

"All I wanted it to be was over." Kor said there have been rumors

that the blood was taken to give to German mothers "to increase the Aryan race, to have twins, which was Mengele's early pioneering effort in multiple births."

Other times, however, blood was taken from the girls until they would faint, she said, to see how much blood a person could lose before passing out.

As for Mengele, he was "a very professional looking scientist," Kor said.

While Kor said she never saw him give injections, "he was always there. He was definitely supervising it," she said. "He was very eloquent, very pleasant looking."

However, there were "two things that gave him away," Kor said. One was his eyes. "There was something very deep and dark."

The other thing was his voice, "when he got angry," she said.

"We were scared of Mengele. We knew almost from the first week that our lives depended on Mengele, that if he wanted us to be alive, we would be alive."

If it hadn't been for the experiments, Kor said, she and Miriam likely would have been gassed their first day at the camp.

"Some of the twins looked up to him like a father figure," Kor said of Mengele. "He was the only one who could at times help save us if that was what he wanted to do."

Still, Kor said, she was a feisty 10-year-old.

"I was never a cooperative victim," she said. "I was a very angry child when I got into the camp. I also never begged for anything. I demanded it or I took it. The Nazis respected people who stood up for themselves or had some spine."

She had to stand up for herself once when she was caught "organizing," or stealing, potatoes for her ailing sister. When the guards found out she was a Mengele twin, she was released and allowed to get the food to Miriam.

Eva became ill once after an injection and tried to hide her high fever. She was found out and taken to the camp hospital. "The rumor was that no one came back alive," Kor said.

Mengele visited, she said, recalling one time when the doctor and four others came in. "Mengele looked at my fever chart and began sarcastically to laugh," Kor said, adding that she heard him say, "Too bad she has only two weeks to live."

She said she determined right then that she would survive and leave the "barrack of the living dead," filled with people who got no food or water and frequently screamed from pain.

"Most of those two weeks are a big blur."

Finally, her fever broke and she convinced the team of doctors that she was well enough to leave.

"That was really probably the most awful place I've ever been in," she said.

"It was the public before that rejected me, that was in favor of my extermination," Kor said. "It was the public now that was accepting me. In some way, it was the acceptance of the public of my pain that helped the healing."

Kor also has started an international organization of surviving Mengele twins called CANDLES (Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Laboratory Experiment Survivors) as well as a Holocaust museum in Terre Haute. She and Miriam visited Auschwitz, which was the busiest Nazi death camp in Poland, in 1985 to reunite the surviving Mengele twins.

Telling it to the young

Kor feels it's especially important today to tell her story to youth.

"I have learned that young people in the United States have a very easy life, from my point of view," she said. "I did not have time to worry about designer clothes" while growing up, Kor said. "I just wanted to eat and live."

"How can I help these young people whose priorities have changed a great deal? I would say every person growing up should have a little bit of hardship, but of course we can't have camps like Auschwitz."

"That doesn't mean they can push an automatic button to accomplishment. They have to work to accomplish something."

"I tell them never, ever to give up. I didn't give up in Auschwitz. I didn't give up in communist Romania, and I'm not giving up now."

Indeed, Kor continues to try not only to bring about healing but also to get more information on experiments the twins endured. She recently filed a lawsuit against Bayer AG, the pharmaceutical company that during the war was part of the German corporation I.G. Farben. She claims that Bayer officials during World War II had a hand in the experiments and wants the corporation to open its files so the information it allegedly possesses will become public knowledge.

"Why is it that 54 years after the war ended, it's still a big secret?" Kor said of companies and institutes reportedly involved in the experiments.

If postwar doctors had been able to learn what was injected into the twins, Kor said, her sister, Miriam, and other Mengele twins might have lived longer. Miriam died in 1993 of kidney disease, which Kor claims was caused by the

experiments.

Learning to heal

While Kor is still fighting the information battle, the healing has largely been accomplished. Besides speaking publicly, an even bigger step was a meeting in 1995 at Auschwitz with a former SS officer and doctor who had been stationed at the camp.

She became aware through U.S. government documents of Hans Munch and got in touch with him in 1993. She said she was hoping he had information on whether Mengele was alive; Munch told her, Kor said, that he was convinced Mengele was alive as late as 1982.

But her contact with Munch, who lived in Germany, turned out to have another purpose.

"He treated me with utmost respect, which I never really expected," Kor said of Munch, who had been exonerated of war crimes thanks to the testimony of Auschwitz inmates who said he had treated them well.

Munch confirmed for her the process of "selection" of who would live at Auschwitz, and the existence and operation of the gas chambers. "He proceeded to describe to me in detail how the gas chamber op-

erates, and I was absolutely flabbergasted," Kor said.

She asked him to sign a document about the existence of the gas chambers, and he agreed. Their two families met together at Auschwitz. "I felt so grateful for his willingness to come," she said.

In turn, Kor said she wrote "a big letter of forgiveness, which turned out to be a declaration of amnesty."

She had been challenged by a friend at Eastern Illinois University to forgive Mengele, she said. "I remember standing by the ruins of the gas chamber, reading this declaration," Kor said. "I felt a burden of pain was lifted from me. I was no longer a prisoner of my past."

"What happens for most people who suffer such horrible pain and prejudice, they cannot remove the pain from their life. I thought of the wonderful feeling that maybe one of the things that society needs to learn is to forgive their worst enemy. It will heal your soul and it will set you free."

"I feel that that is a very important lesson. I am giving my children a legacy of peace, a legacy of forgiveness, and I am giving them a clean slate. They don't have to fight my battle, not like the children of Kosovo or Bosnia or Somalia or any of the other parts of the world."

Those who deny Holocaust must be confronted, Kor says

By MICHAEL MILLER

of the Journal Star

Claims that the Holocaust didn't happen, that 6 million Jews and millions of others weren't systematically murdered by the Nazis in World War II, must be refuted, said Eva Mozes Kor, a survivor of Auschwitz.

"I would be glad to debate with them the real issues and not the name calling," Kor said of those who deny the Holocaust happened or was a planned extermination.

Asked about neo-Nazis and white supremacists, such as East Peoria's Matt Hale, Kor said:

"I always think they should ask themselves why are they so filled with hatred. They feel like they have to be so superior. That is a sign of sickness and real inferiority. What they're doing is pointing the finger at themselves."

But such debates, Kor said, need to be done in venues like classrooms or churches, not "on the street" because "they are thriving on prejudice, going back to the evil that still raises its ugly head."

Hale, Kor said, is a good example of what she was talking

about. She is familiar with the white supremacist thanks to the national exposure he has had recently because of his efforts to get a law license.

"He is saying that he is superior because he is white. I would love to debate him. I think he's an inferior person by his philosophy, because he must somehow make everybody else feel inferior, and only then does he feel superior to anybody.

"That is a dead giveaway of how little he feels about himself. We show our superiority by the way we behave, not by the degrees we accumulate," Kor said of Hale's law degree. "There were an unbelievable number of doctors who acted like butchers in Auschwitz.

"In every group, you're going to find good people and bad people," Kor said. "Unfortunately, among neo-Nazis all I can find is bad. Not a single one of them has any redeeming value. But I think I am willing to talk to them to the extent they are willing to debate it on an intellectual level.

"What makes you a better person is how you act," Kor said. "That is the ultimate test."

Lawsuit says Bayer had role in Nazi experiments

By MICHAEL MILLER

of the Journal Star

Eva Mozes Kor is suing Bayer AG, claiming the company had a role in monitoring and supervising experiments on twins at Auschwitz during World War II.

In the lawsuit, filed in federal court in Terre Haute, Ind., Kor says the pharmaceutical company that makes Bayer aspirin benefited from research conducted when twins were injected with disease-causing germs "to test the effectiveness of various drugs" made by Bayer, which was then a part of I.G. Farben.

The lawsuit seeks to have Bayer open its files, saying it has information on what the twins were injected with. Kor also is seeking damages and the recovery of profits she maintains Bayer earned as a result of such research. Kor said her attorneys are trying to make it a class-action lawsuit for anybody else who was experimented on.

Bayer has, for decades, denied involvement in the experiments and refused to offer

compensation.

Kor said she will talk about the lawsuits on upcoming segments of ABC's "20/20" and "Good Morning, America," although air dates could not be confirmed. She said she decided to file the lawsuit after being asked so many times at lectures what she was being injected with as a 10-year-old child at Auschwitz.

"Very good question," she said she would respond. "I wish I had the answer."

Kor said she concluded in 1997 that one of the doctors involved in the experiments, a "Dr. Koenig," was part of Bayer AG and reported to the company on the results of the experiments.

"I want them to make an accounting for what they have done," she said. "I want all the information that they have. I want just compensation, whatever that may be, whoever will decide, and I also want them to sign (a document) that no pharmaceutical company, that Bayer, will never treat human beings the way we were treated, without consent."